

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15

ICA-11 HA-05 IO-13 /094 W

-----059298 101208Z /43

R 101010Z MAY 78

FM AMEMBASSY BRAZZAVILLE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 534

INFO AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BRAZZAVILLE 0567

E.O. 11652: XGDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, CF, US

SUBJECT: SASSOU-NGUESSO/YHOMBY-OPANGO

SUMMARY: WE DO NOT SEE VICE PRESIDENT SASSOU-NGUESSO ENGAGED IN A DEATH STRUGGLE WITH PRESIDENT YHOMBY-OPANGO AT THIS TIME. END SUMMARY.

1. BASED ON THEIR STRUGGLE FOR POWER FOLLOWING PRESIDENT NGOUABI'S DEATH IN MARCH 1977, A STRUGGLE WHICH LASTED FOR ALMOST ONE MONTH AND LED TO YHOMBY-OPANGO'S ACCESSION TO POWER, MANY OBSERVERS DURING THE ENSUING PERIOD HAVE STUCK TO THE THESIS THAT YHOMBY-OPANGO AND 1ST VICE PRESIDENT/DEFENSE MINISTER SASSOU-NGUESSO REMAIN IN A DEADLY STRUGGLE, AND THAT YHOMBY-OPANGO'S PRESIDENCY WILL NOT BE A VERY LONG ONE. VIRTUALLY EACH NEWCOMER TO THE BRAZZAVILLE SCENE, OURSELVES INCLUDED, AS WELL AS MANY BAKONGO AND LARI HERE AND OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY HAVE HELD OR HOLD THIS THEORY.

2. AS WE HAVE REPORTED PREVIOUSLY (BRAZZAVILLE 389, ETC) WE BELIEVE THAT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO MEN, AT LEAST SINCE DECEMBER LAST, HAS NOT CONSTITUTED SUCH SECRET

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AN EMBITTERED CONTEST. RATHER, THA YHOMBY AND SASSOU HAVE STRUCK SOME SORT OF MODUS IVENDI WHEREBY SASSOU REMAINS RESPONSIBLE FOR CERTAIN KEY DECISIONS WITHIN HIS OWN REALM WHILE YHOMBY IS CLEARLY THE OVERALL BOSS.

3. WE ARE INFLUENCED AMONG OTHER REASONS BY TWO SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS IN THEIR RELATIONSHIP SINCE

THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR: FIRST, YHOMBY WAS ABLE EASILY TO PROMOTE HIMSELF TO GENERAL WITHOUT HAVING TO ADVANCE SASSOU; SASSOU, ON HIS SIDE, IS REPORTED NOT TO HAVE HARBORED ANY ILL FEELINGS AS A RESULT. IN FACT, IN PUBLIC, THE TWO HAVE A STRIKINGLY JOCLAR INTERRELATIONSHIP, WHILE IN PRIVATE, THE MILITARY COMMITTEE HAS ACTED IN A GREATER ATMOSPHERE OF COLLEGIALITY RECENTLY THAN WE HAVE OBSERVED IN PRIOR MONTHS.

4. SECONDLY, YHOMBY COULD HARDLY PLAN TO LEAVE THE CONGO FOR THREE WEEKS, WITH SASSOU IN CONTROL, IF HER WERE NOT CONFIDENT OF HIS OWN POSITION. THIS IS SO PERHAPS BECAUSE YHOMBY AND SASSOU BOTH RECOGNIZE--AND THIS MAY BE THE KEY POINT IN THEIR RELATIONSHIP--THAT SASSOU DOES NOT HAVE ENOUGH INTERNAL STRENGTH WITHIN THE ARMY TO TOPPLE YHOMBY AND MAKE IT STICK AND FURTHER, THAT THE SOVIETS ARE NOT WILLING TO RISK BACKING A COUP ATTEMPT AT THIS TIME, FEARING THAT SUCH AN EFFORT COULD WELL FAIL OR BACKFIRE, AND THEY THEREBY COULD LOSE THE IMPORTANT POSITION WHICH THEY HAVE HERE.

5. THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT SASSOU, WITH HIS CUBAN PRAETORIAN GUARD, IS WITHOUT AMBITION, OR THAT FRICTION WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT DOES NOT EXIST. NOR THAT THE SOVIETS ARE PARTICULARLY PLEASED WITH THE WAY THINGS ARE GOING HERE FOR THEM. SOVIETS REQUESTS FOR A SUBMARINE BASE
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HAVE BEEN REFUSED THRICE BY NGOUABI AND YHOMBY, ACCOUNTING IN NO SMALL PART FOR THE SOVIETS' ICY REFUSAL TO RECEIVE YHOMBY IN MOSCOW. ADDITIONALLY, AMONG THE POPULATION, PRINCIPALLY IN THE SOUTH, YHOMBY IS FAR FROM A POPULAR FIGURE; MANY SOUTHERNERS PREFERRED THE DAYS WHEN THE FRENCH WERE IN GREATER CONTROL AND/OR THE TIME OF NGOUABI, WHO ENCOURAGED A GREATER COALITION. THERE ALSO ARE CERTAIN MIDDLE-LEVEL BUREAUCRATS WHO, DESPITE DIRECTIVES FROM ON HIGH, ARE NOT PARTICULARLY SATISFIED WITH YHOMBY'S "OPENINGS" TO THE WEST, THE U.S. INCLUDED. I PERSONALLY FELT, FOR INSTANCE, LIKE AN ISRAELI WAR BOND SALESMAN IN BAGHDAD LAST WEEK, TALKING UP THE PEACE CORPS IN KINDAMBA (POOL REGION) --ALTHOUGH OUR WELCOME ELSEWHERE WAS VERY WARM, AND THE PC TEAM RECEIVED GOOD MEDIA COVERAGE. TO SURVIVE, YHOMBY ALSO WILL HAVE TO PRODUCE: AT THE VERY LEAST, THE MONTHLY PAYROLL FOR THE GOVERNMENT, INCLUDING THE ARMY, EVEN IF BY THE CONTINUED AND VERY UNCERTAIN PROCESS OF BEGGING FROM DIVERSE DONORS.

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 BRAZZAVILLE 0567

6. FRENCH AMBASSADOR DUFOURCQ AGREES WITH OUR THEISIS, ESTIMATING THAT INSTEAD OF PLOTTING FOR SASSOU, THE SOVIETS ARE PLANNING FOR THE LONGER HAUL, AND THAT POTENTIAL RIVALS TO YHOMBY ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE OFFICERS WHO WILL EMERGE FROM CURRENT TRAINING IN THE SOVIET UNION, OR OTHERS WHO ARE HERE, SUCH AS POINTE-NOIRE MILITARY CHIEF MOUNTONDOU. DUFOURCQ ADDS THAT SASSOU LACKS FINANCIAL RESOURCES NOW TO SUPPORT DEFECTIONS FROM YHOMBY SUPPORTERS. ZAIRIAN AMBASSADOR ATEMBINA-TE-BOMBO ALSO SUBSCRIBES TO THIS ANALYSIS, AND BELIEVES THAT MOBUTU HIMSELF EXAGGERATES THE MENACE OF SASSOU.

7. WE AGREE QTHET THINGS GOING ON WE DON'T KNOW ABOUT. OF LATE, IN FACT, WITH SASSOU CULTIVATING US AND FRENCH TO AN INCREASED DEGREE, AND WITH SOVIETS COMPLAINING TO US THAT SASSOU WOULD NOT RECEIVE THEM, WE SENSED THERE MIGHT BE SOME OVERACTING INVOLVED, WITH SOMETHING IN THE AIR SCHEDULED TO COME DOWN DURING YHOMBY'S ABSENCE. AS PAUL KAYA REMARKED TO ASSISTANT SECRETARY MOOSE (STATE 112332 NOTAL), "YHOMBY WILL BE ELIMINATED BY HIS OWN MEN EVENTUALLY." BUT, AND NOT AT ALL PEJORATIVELY, THERE IS NOTHING
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PECULIAR ABOUT THAT POSSIBILITY IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD, AND WHEN IS "EVENTUALLY"? DUFOURCQ'S

ESTIMATE IS THAT YHOMBY IS GOOD FOR AT LEAST FOUR MORE YEARS IN POWER. WITH DUFOURCQ AND ATEMBINA-TE-BOMBO WE TEND TO SEE YHOMBY STRENGTHENING HIS OWN POSITION, AND WOULD GIVE HIM A REASONABLE LONGEVITY IN THE PROCESS. ME TIME, AND WITH NO NEGATIVE FEEDBACK FROM THE PRESIDENCY, WE DO SEE A FAIR AMOUNT OF SASSOU, WHOSE WIFE ALSO,AS WELL AS MRS. YHOMBY (SEPARATELY), VISITS WITH CHARGE'S WIFE FREQUENTLY. WE WILL CONTINUE TO CULTIVATE SASSOU AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE MILITARY COMMITTEE, WITHOUT JEOPARDIZING OUR OWN POSITION TOWARD ONE AS AGAINST THE OTHER.

9. WE CAN SAY THAT YHOMBY'S OBJECTIVES AND OURS DO MESH: HE IS INTERESTED IN AMERICAN INVESTMENT AND GOOD RELATIONS, AS WE ARE. HE WILL "SETTLE FOR" A MODEST LEVEL OF PRIVATE INVESTMENT; THAT IS ALL WE PROJECT AT THIS TIME--NO BILATERAL US AID. YHOMBY WANTS HIS COUNTRY TO ENJOY GREATER INDEPENDENCE FROM SOVIET INFLUENCE AND JARGON; WE WOULD LIKE THE SAME. HE LIKES OUR PRESENCE, AND THE AMERICAN "WAY OF DOING THINGS." YET, HE CANNOT MOVE TOO QUICKLY VIS-A-VIS RADICALS WITHIN HIS OWN GOVERNMENT (THE LATTER ARE NOT, HOWEVER, POLARIZED AROUND SASSOU.) WE BELIEVE YHOMBY PICTURES AS AN OBJECTIVE A CONGO WHICH IS SOCIALIST, WITH GOOD RELATIONS WITH AND AID FORM VARIETY OF COUNTRIES, WEST AND EAST. AT THE SAME TIME, HE IS QUITE AWARE THAT HIS BEST SOURCES OF REAL CAPITAL AND TECHNOLOGY DO NOT FLY THE RED FLAG. TO THAT EXTENT, WE ARE NOW VERY MUCH "PART OF THE PICTURE" FOR THE GOCB.

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